

Transcription: Jack Jones

Today is Tuesday, October 16th, 2012. My name is James Crabtree and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Jack Jones. This interview is being conducted by telephone. I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Jones is at his home. And sir, it's an honor for us to have you on here today. This interview is being conducted of course in support of the Voices of Veterans Oral History Program which is part of the General Land Office and the Veterans Land Board. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us.

Jack Jones: My privilege, sir.

Yes sir. Sir, the first question that I always like to start off with is in these interviews is please just tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the military.

Jack Jones: I suppose first off I should say where I was born and raised was in Austin, Texas.

Oh really, OK great.

Jack Jones: Oh yes, and at an early age my folks, we moved to Birmingham, Alabama. My dad was a construction fellow, and we stayed there for a while, and then we moved back. We didn't come back to my home. The city we moved to was Houston, Texas, where there was a lot of work going on, and I left there at age 17. I was raised up as more or less a Christian. My dad was a Baptist minister some, but he wasn't a Christian until I was in the service, but mom was a good Christian. My great grandfather was a Baptist minister, a circuit riding preacher. I joined the Navy at age 16 and left on my 17th birthday which was January, well my birthday is January the 14th, 1924, but I left on January the 17th to embrace my new future as a service person.

What was it, sir, that attracted you to the Navy?

Jack Jones: Well my dad was in World War I. He was a Navy person. He had served in that war, and I don't know, it just seemed like it attracted me as days went by. He didn't talk a whole lot about it, but enough that I decided, of course at that time I was in high school, and all the kids, all the boys were talking about this was a time within our history of our United States the government was signing up people for a year, getting ready for World War II, and we were all talking about as youngsters, well let's join up, let's join up. You know how kids are. So that led me and my best friend, which was named Tommy Buckley – he's deceased, but he was in World War II and was on one of the flat tops that got sunk. He managed to make it out and get out of the service, too, but he and I joined the Navy together.

And you had to have your parents' permission because of your age.

Jack Jones: Yeah, my mom wouldn't sign but dad said yeah, if that's what you got to do son, I'll sign you up.

That's great. Why did your mom say she wouldn't sign?

Jack Jones: Well, she didn't want to see me get killed. She says I don't want you in the Navy. Of course the war wasn't going on at that time. This was almost a year before World War II started.

That's true, but I guess though with the peace time draft and with the war in Europe and other parts of Asia, you probably had to have known that there was a chance, right, that the war might come to the U.S.?

Jack Jones: I'm sure she did, because she went through World War I, you know. And my dad did, too. So I went off to the Navy, got on an old train out of Houston, Texas, and went to San Diego, California, for my training. It was a dirty trip. In those days they didn't have an air conditioner on the trains and the windows were open and they were coal-driven. When I got there I was soot covered over and it was terrible. So I spent my boot camp in San Diego. Shortly after that, I went to Great Lakes training school in Chicago, or right out of Chicago.

Did you know what your job was going to be, or were you just a basic recruit at that point?

Jack Jones: Well, I had always when I was growing up before I was ever in the Navy or anything, I was mechanically inclined. My dad had got me an old piece of a car and I tore that thing down and rebuilt it and all of that business when I was 15-16 years old. So I felt like I wanted to be in that type of work. So I went to service school and when I left Great Lakes, Illinois, from that school they sent me to Dearborn, Michigan, and I spent several months in the Dearborn Ford factory. That was quite an experience, yes. And of course all of my, my whole duty, my six years I served, was quite, well it was quite a trip, quite a trip, and when I left there, I went to – getting to where I can't think – out of LA there, I can't think of that town, and picked up the battleship Tennessee.

Were you out of the Naval station there at Long Beach?

Jack Jones: Long Beach is where we went. And when I got on that thing, well I immediately went on what we called the black gang in the Navy. The black gang served underneath the deck and I landed up in the A Division, which was the small boats, refrigeration and such. And off we went out to Pearl Harbor to work out of there, and we trained some out there. I was assigned to the small boats.

The battleship, to let people know that aren't familiar, the battleship Tennessee, that was a big ship.

Jack Jones: Mighty big.

Tell us what your impressions were the first time you went aboard the Tennessee.

Jack Jones: I was awed. It was so large and it was just something I couldn't imagine because I had signed up to go on a destroyer, and of all things they put me on a battleship. When we got to Pearl Harbor, well of course we got to go ashore, and I being 17 years old never had shaved before. And I went up on deck and at that time the deck officer had to inspect everyone that went ashore. We lined up for inspection and he got to me and he looked at me and he says, you need to shave, sailor. Yes sir, I don't shave. Well you're gonna shave now or you won't go ashore. So I went back down below deck and as I was walking, ha-ha-ha-ha, I got flack from everybody. They had a good joke on me, but that was one of the first things in my Navy career that I'll never forget. But we stayed there in Pearl Harbor and worked out of there. We were out there in the Pacific where we saw the Japanese Navy.

Oh, that's interesting.

Jack Jones: Yeah, it was. And we sat on the ____ talking, as young guys will. And we said that blankety-blank four eyes so and so can't shoot. They'll never sink our Navy, and all that. And we came back into Pearl Harbor, and all this was several months later, and they docked us at what we called Ford Island.

That's right, I know where that is.

Jack Jones: Yes. And our ship was forward of the Arizona, the West Virginia tied up beside us, and the Oklahoma forward.

And that was battleship row.

Jack Jones: What's called battleship row. And we was the only one that didn't get sunk. Of course we were protected from the stuff that the Japs brought, one of the things that I guess embittered me, I had a problem very muchly so, their little old torpedoes, those airborne torpedoes were not enough to sink our battleships for your information or anyone that wants to listen. They called an admiral's inspection and they had us open up all of our double bottoms on all of those ships, and they had us tear down our guns, and we wondered why because we had never ever in the history of the United States Navy opened up the double bottoms in a foreign port. At that time, Hawaii was not a state. We didn't think anything about that, you know. So they shipped out all of the cruisers, the flat tops, and the destroyers from the port and left us in there as sitting ducks so that we might get out of our Depression in America. Infamy, Mr. Roosevelt said, a day event for me, was on him as far as I'm personally concerned. I didn't get to see the battle, so-called battle, it wasn't much of a battle for us. When I came up at 5 o'clock that afternoon, I'll never forget the mayhem and just absolute, it was just awful. My words can't express just how awful it was. Well being on the small boats after that, we had some cleanup to do and everything, we had to pick up all our sailor buddies from out of the drink that were killed and take them over to Wahoo to bury them. That left ingrained in my mind it was just, can you imagine a 17-year-old kid having to do that? And I had a couple of trips on that ship after we got out of there. It took us nearly a month to get out of there because we were wedged in, and they sent us to Birmingham, Washington, to the shipyard there for a few repairs, and then they had a couple of little skirmishes down there in the Pacific, a couple of islands there where we were backup. Well after that they sent us back to, we didn't get in any battles by the way. We were just backup if they needed us.

Let me ask you sir before you go too far with that, tell us a little bit more about your memory of Pearl Harbor that morning, so that people know that was a Sunday morning, December 7th of '41. Where were you when the bombing started? Were you inside your ship?

Jack Jones: Yes, I was down in my compartment where we lived, and about the third deck down. I was kind of a wise guy, dodged what the Army calls KP, and we called it mess cooking. They finally caught up with me and I was mess cooking. Well on that ship we had 20 guys we had to take care of, each one of us mess cooks had to take care of, and we had tables much like these you see in the cafeteria or whatever, folded up, and we hung them on the overhead. We had to lift those things up and hang 'em up and overhead and I had to put all our gear up, and I had just finished doing that, had got my gear up to the galley, put it up, and had come back down, and heard the first rumble, and they sounded general quarters. Well I looked out the porthole and I saw an old red dot on that airplane flying over Ford Island. My first indication

was before that on Sunday morning, general quarters, what's the matter with these people? I looked out that porthole and saw that airplane and I scuttled off to my general quarters post which is down below, shoving up ammunition. Of course we couldn't shove any until we got our guns back together, but we got it up there, got it put back together and got to shoot a little bit, but that's what I was doing that morning.

As soon as you saw that plane, you knew then we were at war?

Jack Jones: Oh yes, and we kept, of course we had a phone coming down to where we were handling the ammunition, and then would tell us well, this ship sunk and that ship sunk, and we kept saying oh no, they couldn't sink our ships. But when I got up on deck that afternoon at 5 o'clock, I seen it for my own eyes. I'll never forget it.

And the Arizona was close to you, right?

Jack Jones: Oh, right behind us.

When there was an explosion aboard the Arizona, tell us what that was like.

Jack Jones: Well it shook our ship. Of course all I could feel down there, we were boxed in in a little compartment feeding ammunition up to our anti-aircraft guns. That was the one I had. That's where I was. And of course it shook our ship, but we got a couple of bombs ourselves, and just for all practical purposes, all I could be was like in a thunderstorm or something, in a house, you know. I was boxed in down there where I couldn't, it was far down in that big ship, you know.

You were probably below the water line.

Jack Jones: Oh well below, we were right on the bottom of the ship. So I couldn't even imagine what was going on up there. All I could hear is what somebody told us on the phone coming down to us, telling us what was happening. My first impression was when I got up there at 5 o'clock when they sounded, I can't think anymore, but when they shut us down, all clear, well I got to go up there and see what had happened.

And then at that point, the rest of the world and the rest of the United States is eventually getting the news of what had occurred. How long was it before you were able to get word back to your family that you were OK?

Jack Jones: Oh, all I could do was write a little letter, and I done that as soon as I could. I don't remember just how long it was.

I'm sure your parents, when they heard that Pearl Harbor had been attacked and ships had been sunk, they probably had to have worried that you might have been one of those lost.

Jack Jones: Right. Of course after, I'm sure here in the United States after a few days, a day or two, maybe three, four, they put the word out which ship was sunk and whatever. I wasn't here, of course. But I'm sure they told how many ships were sunk. My dad and them knew which ship I was on.

So they might've been able to see that and felt a little bit better knowing that you weren't on the Arizona and that sort of thing. So then at that point, sir, I know it took a while to get the ship, you said about a week to get your ship out simply because of all the sunk ships around it, you just couldn't move it.

Jack Jones: Right, they had to take tugboats and cable lines to pull us, and squeeze us out of there. We was just a big job. And they finally got us out and got us back to sea and we come back to the United States to Birmingham, Washington, to the shipyard there, which is right out of Seattle. And we stayed there I guess maybe a month, I don't know how long, I can't remember just how long it was. We had a few repairs where the bombs had hit us, and then we went out. After we left there, we went to those two excursions and I can't remember which islands it was. They were the first two battles that they had with the Japanese Navy, and we were backups. Our ships were obsolete. That's the reason they were sitting ducks for the attack. Then they brought us back to San Francisco for further repairs at the shipyard there.

And it was there for quite a while, right?

Jack Jones: Oh, we were there a couple of months. But there I got transferred. I got intoxicated one night and come back and the deck officer said something I didn't like and I cussed him out, and what called the Navy Shanghai'd me, and they sent me off to the East Coast. I went to New York City and I lived in Brooklyn a while while they took a C-5 cargo ship converted over to an APA, assault troop transport, and that was my next duty after I got off the battleship.

So you were at the naval yard there in Brooklyn.

Jack Jones: Yeah, but while they were preparing the ship getting it converted over to a war ship, I lived there in Brooklyn. I rented an apartment and lived there while they were doing that.

I'm sure then you didn't like being taken away from your ship. I would imagine you had probably gotten close to other members of the crew on the Tennessee.

Jack Jones: Oh yeah, it was quite a change, but you know when you foul up in this life, there's always a price to pay, and my price was to get, and it was a whole lot worse duty on that battleship.

What did they have you doing on the assault troop transport?

Jack Jones: Well as you know we had the landing craft on there, and as I was in boats on the battleship, so I was on the APA, USS Lyon. And my job was when we took on the troops, was to assign the right soldiers to the right landing craft and get 'em over board and get 'em on their way to make the invasion. And the first one we made was Saffy, Africa. And the second one we made was Palermo, Sicily. And the third one we made was Salerno, Italy. Our home port over there was a little place in the Mediterranean in north Africa called Mers el Kebir, near Oran, Africa, and I stayed over there for a good part of the war working with the 1st Infantry Division out of Massachusetts and the 2nd Armored Division, and also the 36th Division out of Texas, which made the Salerno invasion. But the 1st Infantry boys made it all the way from north Africa all the way up, they landed on the foot from Sicily, and made it all the way through Italy all the way up to France and fought at Germany. They come out of there with just 10 percent of their original crew. It was terrible. And I worked with all these guys and seen all of this. And the

36th Infantry Division got wiped out at Salerno. They were just a bunch of old country boys from Texas, and some of them hadn't even been in the Army six weeks.

So you were on the landing craft then that would take them to shore.

Jack Jones: Right.

And then drop them off and then return to the ship and I guess pick up another load?

Jack Jones: No, I didn't ride the boats. My job, I would see that the right ones got on the right landing boats, and then of course at Palermo, I had to go on the beach. A lot of us did because all the soldiers got wiped out and they didn't have anybody to unload craft. When they sent the boat back, we'd put their equipment on there and send it back with them so they would have it. So they had nobody on the beach to unload the boats, so some of us had to go over there on the beach and unload the boats. I stayed over there a couple of days. It was rough.

I bet.

Jack Jones: Oh yeah. Bullets flying all around you, at night especially when those tracer bullets, you know, flying all around, I said well I won't make it back home this time. But while I was there, I had a friend was named Jack Jones also from home.

He had the same name as you.

Jack Jones: Same name as I have. Well when the news got back and I got to see him, he was on my ship with the soldiers. He was a Navy medic, what we call a pill roller. But anyway, he got killed there at Palermo, and the word got back home and everybody thought oh, I got killed, mom and dad and all of them, until we got it straightened out.

How did they find out?

Jack Jones: I can't remember. All I know is that they did and they were quite concerned, you know, and naturally they would be. But that was quite a thing for me. I had a lot of experience, and we won't have time in this interview for me to tell you all the experiences I had, but it was something else over there. Then Salerno, we set there five days at Salerno and watched the 36th Infantry get wiped out in that town. If you've ever seen the movie, Guns of Navarro -

That's right, a very famous movie.

Jack Jones: Yeah, it's a very famous movie, well I was there and I cried like a baby. It was just terrible to watch it. The third day, this is something you didn't see in the movie or anywhere else, I had never heard of it, and I'm kind of a history buff, but on the third day, they stopped the war. They called a truce and they stacked those boys up like cord wood, man, so they could continue the fighting.

I didn't know that.

Jack Jones: Well, not many people do because not many of us old codgers around to tell the story. Anyway, we stayed there five days thinking it was going to be another Dunkirk, but it wasn't. The boys finally won at a terrible, terrible price, and I don't know, you know people

think they know about World War II and the history of it and all, the cause and the battles, all these battles that they did going through Italy and up through France, all the way to Germany. It was terrible, my friend. It was awful. I don't know. It left a stain on this old man. When I was young, I wouldn't talk about it for many, many years. My daughter there that you met was with me, she didn't even know it until she had a daughter in high school. Or no, she was in elementary school, and she wanted to write a thing on the Pearl Harbor deal, and of course they knew I had been there, but I had never talked about it because I was so embittered, matter of factly. I came home on leave one time and the subject of President Roosevelt came up and at that time I was not a Christian, and I cursed him, and said I didn't have any use for him. My dad of course, all of them in America thought he was near God, and that was the only time my dad and I ever had any, we were always big buddies, and he ordered me out of his house. But that was a terrible war. It was awful. My last ship I was on, I picked up in Orange, Texas. I'm talking a lot, maybe you have some questions along the way.

My big goal is just to get you to talk and just to share the story because we want to save it for future generations and for posterity, and so I'm sure the people listening like myself, we just want to hear your story, and you're telling us a lot. So I don't want to be the one doing all the talking.

Jack Jones: Well if you have a question, stop me. I'm just hitting some of the high spots because in six years a lot of things happen and all of the war. After we finish this interview, I'll probably think of some things I should've said that I didn't say. My memory's not so well as it used to be. Of course I've been talking about it a little more in the last ten years and I've brought up, and I keep thinking about some things I had forgotten because I've forgotten a lot of it because when you put it out of your mind, you have a tendency to forget.

That's true, and then it comes back to you if you start to -

Jack Jones: As I have been talking about it over the last ten years or so when I kind of finally got to where I would talk about it, some of the things I'm reminded of. But the next ship I picked up, I got off that ship and I was sent to Orange, Texas. Well I was sent first to Florida for training to pick up what we called the destroyer escorts. Just a little bit smaller than a destroyer, and we were sub chasers.

Kind of like a frigate?

Jack Jones: Well no, it was a fighting ship. We had three-inch guns on it, and a couple of anti-aircraft guns, but basically we were sub chasers.

That's what I mean, sir, by a frigate. They're smaller than destroyers.

Jack Jones: Right, smaller than a destroyer.

I think I know exactly what you're talking about.

Jack Jones: Yeah. Well we headed for the north Atlantic to chase submarines, which we did, and we done some convoy work, protecting the convoys up there going through that route that they had up there, and we got into, there was six of our ships, all of us destroyer escorts, and DE's we called 'em, and we left New York City just before the European Theater declared the war was over. We got into a battle with some submarines up there, and my brother was on the

USS Davis but he'd gotten off. Our home port was New York. I spent a lot of time in New York, about three or four years I guess, as my home port back and forth on both those ships. When we left New York, I didn't know that he had gotten off. They put him on shore patrol, but I didn't know this when we left. Well his ship got sunk, the Davis got sunk, and I just thought I lost my brother, because we only got about 10 percent of those guys. They froze to death in that drink up there. It was cold. But anyway, we captured that sub. We surfaced it, captured the crew, and sunk the sub. The war was over two weeks when this happened. We didn't know it. I didn't know it for years until my brother told me. He was in the Navy also, my middle brother, we were three of us boys. I didn't know we fought the last battle in the European Theater after the war was over.

That's interesting. I'll have to look that up. I wasn't familiar with that story.

Jack Jones: Yeah, so one of the incidents that happened, of course we were jammed up. We had a ship that was rigged out for a 100-man crew and we usually had 200 on there with all the gunnery and all that we had to do. We were overcrowded to begin with, and then we had to take on these Germans. So one ship had got 'em all. There was 33 on their crew, and one ship had gotten them all up after we captured them. So they said we can't handle all 33 of these guys. And so we had a boatswain's chair, one of those traveling clothes lines. You'd hook it up between the ships. And they issued them a flashlight. So they hooked us up at night and that old Germany guy got on that boatswain and they took that flashlight away and got about halfway out there between the ships and started signaling with it, trying to get his buddies to see him so they could sink us. Well somebody on the other ship took his knife out and cut that line and dropped him in the drink.

Geez.

Jack Jones: So we drug him aboard, and of course he was safety seated in there. He had his safety belts on and all that stuff, in that boatswain seat, and we drug him into our ship. Oh, he was a drowned rat, and I was chief petty officer over the crew and my superior was named Stephenson. He was a JG I believe, I'm not sure. I can't remember just what his rating was now. Either that or I think he was JG. A heck of a nice guy, and on that small ship, regulation didn't amount to much to us. His name was Stephenson and we all called him Steve. Old Steve said Jack, pick him up and take him down to the sick bay. And I looked at him and I said Steve, I'm going to tell you something. If I pick that guy up, I'm going to throw him right back in that drink. I said I ain't picking him up. He didn't say a word. He looked over at my assistant, old Leo, and he said Leo, he said pick him up and take him. He said what Jack says is good enough for me, Steve. And finally old Oscar Krats, the least one in our crew – there was seven of us in that crew, Oscar was seaman, and he said I'll pick him up and take him down there. Old Steve never said a word about that to anybody. I guess he could understand our feelings. He was trying to get us sunk. We got in a storm up there on that ship that lasted seven days up there in the north Atlantic. It was terrible. We didn't get to eat anything, couldn't. It was so bad it was putting the fires out, fire in the engine room. We was at the mercy of the sea. And it cracked our ship and we thought we were gonna sink. I said that to say this. In all of World War II, I can't ever remember being scared so bad until it made a mark on my mind, but I go scared in that storm. I just knew we were gonna sink and I was gonna wind up in that cold water. This was after I'd seen my ship mates, on my brother's ship. But we made it and they sent us to Orjenson, Newfoundland. They had a little dry dock there and they patched us up and sent us back to the United States and sent us to Troyson, South Carolina for further repairs to get the ship redone.

Then they were gonna ship us over to the Pacific to continue the war, but while we were there in dry dock, the war was over.

I'm sure that had to have been a great relief for you and all your crew mates.

Jack Jones: Oh yeah, we threw a big party. We were in dry dock there and we threw a big party. We had beer on the ship for the recreation time we had when we were oversea, they would put us out somewhere, and we had a little beer on there, so we all got pretty well, I don't know whether I should tell you this or not, but my best friend was named Duke Baser. He was a yeoman, and he was from here. He was raised up in Port Arthur. So the captain was there with us, and he pulled the captain's hat off, and we was all rr-rr-rr, hollering, he pulled the skipper's hat off and throwed it down on the deck, he said I always wanted to do that, captain! Oh, we was all drunk.

I bet it was a great celebration and a great relief that it was finally all over.

Jack Jones: Oh yeah, we were having a whale of a time. We were shouting and carrying on and just hell, it was a free for all. Everybody was I guess from what some of the things I've seen pictures I've seen, everybody was happy. Of course that was a long war.

That's right and you'd been in it from the beginning to the end.

Jack Jones: To the very end. And when we finally got out of dry dock, they sent us over to Greencoast Springs, Florida, and put us in groups of six in the St. John's River there. Have you ever been over there?

I have. I've got a brother in law that lives in Jacksonville, Florida, so I've been over to that area so I'm familiar with it.

Jack Jones: Man, it looks like the ocean, that old river does. It's so big you can't hardly see the other beach on the other side when we were out in the middle of it.

That's right.

Jack Jones: Anyhow they put us to mothballing those ships and that's where I was when I got paid off.

Did you want to get out of the Navy or was it pretty much forced on you?

Jack Jones: Not particularly. I liked the Navy, I love the Navy, but in the meantime I got married in November of '44, and we had a baby. She was a year old and I was Acting Chief on some of these stories when I was telling you about it, but I hadn't, I was 1st Class Petty Officer, Acting Chief, because we didn't have enough guys. So I got my rating for Chief Petty Officer while I was there mothballing those ships. Well it was dirty, nasty business. Man, they had me a First Class Petty Officer, Acting Chief, down in the bilges cleaning that thing up, working, and I was a little disgruntled about it. I couldn't, you just couldn't do a First Class Petty Officer that way. So I was a little angry about it, and then when I had a Mustang officer, TG. You know what a Mustang is?

Yes sir, I'm one myself.

Jack Jones: You're a Mustang, OK, you understand what I'm speaking of. Well anyhow he called me in the office and said Jack, your rating come. He said you're gonna be a full Chief. I said that's great, I'll get paid off as Chief. He says oh wait a minute, there's a little kink here, he says. I'm not gonna hang it on you unless you ship over. Of course everybody was getting out and they were short-handed mothballing those ships. Well you can imagine what I said. I wasn't a Christian then. And so I got paid off in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1947. Well it was '46. I had two months of leave coming.

So you did four years then in the Navy from '40 to '46.

Jack Jones: I stayed in there six years. And I come back to Texas.

Did you stay in good touch with some of the folks that you had served with during the war?

Jack Jones: Only one I did was my old buddy. Like I say I was bitter, very bitter over Pearl Harbor. It just about wrecked my mind. I didn't want anything to do with anything anymore. I had one fella by the name of Gummany that I kept up with for a while, a Chief that I had worked with, but I lost track of him after a while. I was often wondering about some of my buddies on the Tennessee. I had two or three good buddies on there that I never did keep up with. I did for a while, but one of them got killed. He got Shanghai'ed, too, and he got killed in the African invasion, the first one. So I lost track of the two that I really kept up with, only two. Of course I'm American Legion, and I look in our little magazine every now and then to see if some old buddies are writing in about something. But I never have wrote in to see about, well I did, too. I called one of the old boys on the Tennessee but he had been on there a later date after I got off the ship. I didn't know him.

Let me ask you, sir, how we met last week, you were getting ready to go to Washington on the honor flight to see the World War II memorial, and tell us a little bit about that, how you even came to find out about it and then tell us about the trip because I understand it was a great trip.

Jack Jones: Well one of my daughters lives there at Liberty Hill, and she got in contact with these folks. They said well, it's for Austin people. She said well my daddy was raised up in Austin. So that's the way I got on the trip there, through my daughter, and she was with me. She was one of my sponsors.

Oh, that's great.

Jack Jones: I enjoyed it thoroughly, you're asking me about it.

Yes sir, tell us about it because I just think it was a great honor for all of you -

Jack Jones: I count it one of the privileges of my life, sir. It was just wonderful and I intend to write a letter to those folks, you folks, you're part of it, for what you think of all us old codgers.

Well tell us, sir, for those listening. It was a program for World War II veterans to fly the veterans to Washington, D.C., to see the World War II memorial at no cost. Tell us what it was like when you actually got to Washington with all your fellow veterans.

Jack Jones: Well let me say this, before we got there when we went to the airport, many of your folks were there. I would say 600-700 people were there to see us off which I thought was just amazing, just really amazing that that many people would take time out to come to the airport to ship us off.

Yeah, the Austin Police Chief was there and the local news media and a lot of volunteers.

Jack Jones: Oh yes, I was just awed with this. I couldn't, it's hard for me, of course I will say this about the World War II veterans. We came home and believe me, it was very difficult to find a job because we flooded the job market, and we didn't gripe, we didn't complain, we just went ahead and got our due, raised our families, went to work, quite differently from the Vietnam veterans. I know they had a tough time. My son was supposed to go with us but my daughter couldn't quite get it done in time. He was a Vietnam veteran come home all smeared out and messed up. But our attitude was altogether different from those of the Vietnam veterans. We just come home and went to work and done a part of building the United States that we know today. I never thought of myself as a hero or anything other than I done what I feel like any good all-American boy would do.

Sure, I think that's right.

Jack Jones: Join up and fight for your country. And that's the way I've always believed. So when I come there and seen all those folks and even the Mayor of the city.

That's right. He flew with you, didn't he?

Jack Jones: Oh, he was just one of the boys. And it's just beyond my comprehension. I can't, well, what I say, I can't understand it but it happened, and I'm so appreciative of it that words cannot express in my little finite mind the tear and the love that a whole bunch of people went out of their way to see that 50 of us got to go to Washington, D.C. Can you imagine?

And you had a great reception when you got there, right?

Jack Jones: Oh, boy there was about 1,500 people greeted us there at Washington. I got so many hugs and shakes and stopped and everything, it was awesome.

That's great.

Jack Jones: Then when we got assigned, Connie was supposed to push me, my daughter, on that wheelchair, which by the way I didn't stay much in that wheelchair. I'm an able bodied character. God's blessed me richly with a good body. But anyway they assigned me a Colonel and I want to say his name to all the world to understand he was a wonderful young man. His name is Dan Wolf, and he stayed with me the whole time and I just thought it was just magnificent and wonderful. And he wasn't the only one. A whole bunch of service men was there with us. They were more than us, considerably more than us, and tended to our every little need. They bowed over backwards, all of you folks and the folks there were so wonderful.

Now they brought World War II veterans in from a lot of other places besides just Austin, right?

Jack Jones: Oh, well there were some. I met a couple of them that were from other places, but all of us were Austinites.

OK, I thought maybe they had other honor flights that had flown up there the same day to meet everybody.

Jack Jones: Well I don't know. We didn't see anyone else, but I will say this, we were greeted royally by the folks that were in the grounds there. They were just school kids and I'll tell you one little incident that happened. We stopped at one place there for a rest for a few minutes and it was where you could get a drink of water and a soda pop or whatever, and there was a whole group of Chinese young men, I guess 15 or 20 of them. And one of them came up to me and he could speak very little English, but enough to say it, liked for me to pose with him for a picture. I said yeah. And the Colonel was standing there. He asked him, he said did you ever meet a real hero? And the guy said no. He said well you just met one, this is a Pearl Harbor veteran. And that guy, he come alive. He jabbered something in Chinese and every one of those guys started hollering and looking at me and shaking out their hands and every one of them wanted to have their picture taken with me. It was about a 15 or 20 minute job that we had to do, and then they had all of them get together and some one of your folks there took our picture, so you might see it sometime or another there with all those Chinese young men. They were just awed. But it was the whole venture was just that way.

That's great, and what did you think of the memorial itself?

Jack Jones: Well seeing it on television and seeing the wall, and how much commotion was made of the Vietnam wall, I had a little, I said that don't look good to me. But when I got there to see it in the for real, no picture, being there and a part of it, it is awesome. Our World War II monument is just awesome. It was worth a trip to go see it.

And it's right there in between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington monument, is that right?

Jack Jones: Right. But I guess one that I was most awed of, World War II, but the Korean one, I don't know if you've ever seen it or not.

Yes sir.

Jack Jones: It's awesome.

It is.

Jack Jones: I could've tried to imagine it with snow on the ground like it would be in its actual setting. But when we got to the flag raising on Iwo Jima memorial -

Yeah, the Marine memorial.

Jack Jones: It kind of, I don't know, it's just something special, those boys, we lost so many Marines and soldiers there on that thing, and even sailors on that little volcano island, still it was awesome to me. The other thing, don't misunderstand me, all of it is awesome, but some of it stands out more than the others. The change of the guards was awesome. We weren't expecting to see it.

So you went over to the Arlington National Cemetery then?

Jack Jones: Yeah, right. We weren't supposed to see that. It wasn't in on the deal, but we got to see the changing of the guard and that is awesome. It is awesome. So all of it put together, I was just very, very, very awed.

It's great that they were able to finally do something like that for you and your fellow World War II veterans to have a memorial and for you to get to see it. I think that's the least everyone could do for you and your fellow veterans. So I'm glad to hear that it was such a great trip.

Jack Jones: Like I said, I don't like to reiterate too much when I speak to folks, but the World War II veterans never did get too much attention from America, not a great deal, nor did we expect any.

Yeah, they didn't ask for it.

Jack Jones: And for all of you folks there to take time out from your busy life, and anymore I'm glad I'm not in the workplace anymore. I don't know as I could keep up with it. It's so frantic anymore. That you would take time out to react to a bunch of old guys like us and then just treat us like kinds.

Yeah, well I think it's an honor and I think it's something that everybody loved to do. I just wish there was a way they could do more for all the World War II veterans and especially all that we've lost that never had that chance to go see the memorial or be thanked in that way, so it's just a good thing they've done.

Jack Jones: I'm proud of my old home town. I tell everybody I'm from Texas, Austin, Texas. I was born on the Colorado River, right off the Colorado River on a little old slew there in a little old two bedroom house. My mama had us right there in the house, and one other thing. I hadn't been back to Austin in about 20 years.

Oh, so it's changed a lot.

Jack Jones: Oh Lordy, it's just beyond my comprehension.

Yeah, it's changed a lot, it's really grown. But you said your daughter lives out in Liberty Hill?

Jack Jones: Liberty Hill.

Yeah, I'm not far from there. My family, we live in Leander, close to Liberty Hill.

Jack Jones: Oh yeah, she got a ticket when we was coming back from the airport there in Leander.

Oh really. We live just outside the Leander city limits close to Liberty Hill up there by Highway 29. So that's a small world.

Jack Jones: My parents' friends just moved from here to Cedar Park.

That's right there in the same area. Well sir, I tell you, I really do appreciate you taking some time to share with us your memories and your thoughts. It means a great deal to this program,

especially because our whole goal is to save these stories so that they're around long after you and I are both gone, and we have documents here at the Land Office that go back to the 1700s. We have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received when he was killed at The Alamo, and we have the original Registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of the first settlers that came to Texas and with that in mind, is there anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview, years, potentially decades from now?

Jack Jones: Speaking of the history end of it, did you ever work with David Barton any?

No, I'm familiar with him but I've no worked with him. You're talking about the wall builders?

Jack Jones: Yes.

Yes sir, I definitely know who he is but I've never worked with him personally.

Jack Jones: Well I guarantee you if you want to know something about Texas history and the history of the United States, he's got it.

Yeah he is, he's a good historian.

Jack Jones: He's a great man. Well I'd like to say this, my brother. This is the most attention, and I don't crave attention, that's not my goal in life. Mine is to help somebody along life's way as a Christian, that's my job. But I have certainly appreciated everything that you folks have done because it's a major milestone in this old man's life, and words cannot, it just cannot express the gratitude that I have for all that you folks are doing and have done for me personally, and I want to say I enjoyed the trip. It was a little fast for old folks, but we made it. It was wonderful.

That's great, that's excellent. Well sir, I'm just honored that I've had a chance to interview you and I'm very thankful that everyone was able to come together to thank you and your fellow veterans, and like I mentioned I think before we actually started recording, in a week or two we're going to send you copies of this interview on CD's along with a nice letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson and it's just again one small way that the state of Texas can tell you thank you for your service to our nation.

Jack Jones: Well thank you sir, and like I say, my words can't express how much I think of you for it.

Yes sir, well we think greatly of you and your fellow veterans and that's what this is all about. So again sir, thank you very much and I'm sure we'll be in contact again soon and in a week or two be looking for a package from me.

Jack Jones: I'll be looking for it and may God bless you in your efforts and all the folks there with you. I'll be praying for you.

You too, thank you very much sir.

Jack Jones: All right, bye.

[End of recording]